

T-O-P S-E-C-R-E-T

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

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SUBJECT: SNIE 10-7-65: IMPLICATIONS OF A CERTAIN US COURSE
OF ACTION

THE PROBLEM

To estimate Communist reactions if the US does not attack the surface-to-air missile sites, light bombers, and fighters recently furnished to the DRV by the USSR.

DISCUSSION

1. Since April, the Soviet Union has been furnishing to North Vietnam a variety of weapons. Among these the most important are about 30 MIG-15/17s, some with limited all-weather capabilities, three SAM sites under construction near Hanoi, and eight light jet bombers (IL-28), which have been ferried across China to Phuc Yen airfield since 21 May.

T-O-P S-E-C-R-E-T

GROUP 1
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2. We think this program of military assistance was initiated to deter the US from extending its air attacks to the Hanoi-Haiphong complex. In the Communist view the deterrence would rest not so much on the combat capabilities of the weapons as on the manifestation of a deepening Soviet commitment. In effect, Hanoi and Moscow are hoping that this new program, added to other pressures on US policy (e.g., domestic and world opinion), will dissuade the US from extending air attacks northward. The Soviet program of military assistance also represents a part of Moscow's effort to increase its influence, relative to that of Communist China, on the Hanoi regime.

3. If the US refrained from such an extension, though the Soviets would probably continue to augment North Vietnam's air defense capabilities (e.g., by providing additional SAMs, AAA, radar, and fighters), the supply of offensive weapons might not go much beyond present levels. The USSR and the DRV might conclude that they had already succeeded in establishing an effective deterrent and judge that significantly greater numbers of weapons such as IL-28s would only raise the chances of eventual US attacks on key targets north of the 20th parallel.

- 2 -

T-O-P S-E-C-R-E-T

4. On the other hand, the supply of jet light bombers represents a change in the character of Soviet aid which may point to a larger buildup. These aircraft give the DRV a capability to strike against targets in South Vietnam, Thailand, and Laos. The USSR also realizes that IL-28s became a highly charged issue during the Cuban missile crisis, and that the US insisted upon their removal while permitting Cuba to retain defensive systems. If the US tacitly accepted them, Moscow and Hanoi might conclude that an important test had been passed and that they could extend the buildup of offensive weapons without incurring unacceptable risks. In this event, they would probably expect their SA-2 defenses, as these became operational, to reduce US reconnaissance and mask a further buildup.

5. We think it unlikely that the DRV now intends to use IL-28s in offensive operations. They would almost certainly calculate that this action would invite a US retaliation which would probably not be limited to the airfields supporting the operation of the bombers. Moreover, we think that the general line of DRV strategy still is to concentrate on the guerrilla war in the South which they expect to win, and not themselves to take the initiative in widening the war.

- 3 -

T-O-P S-E-C-R-E-T

T-O-P S-E-C-R-E-T

6. But these aircraft would widen the DRV's offensive options, and circumstances might arise in which Hanoi chose to use them. In particular, we cannot exclude the possibility that, even now, Hanoi means to try an individual raid against some psychologically important target such as Da Nang or a US aircraft carrier.

7. Whatever the Communists' precise intentions at present, US acceptance of the present buildup would be encouraging to them. They would probably infer that the US, at least for the time being, had accepted certain limitations and ground rules in the bombing of the DRV.

8. The Chinese would be concerned by the probable increase in Soviet influence in Hanoi, but at the same time they might be reassured by the anticipated hardening of DRV determination to carry on without negotiations. They would also be somewhat relieved of their apprehensions that the US would escalate the war to bomb targets in China.

9. The Soviets would probably view their involvement as now somewhat less dangerous, although still not without risks, and they might be encouraged to put greater pressure on the US. At the

T-O-P S-E-C-R-E-T

T-O-P S-E-C-R-E-T

same time, Moscow would probably still hope that a negotiated settlement could be arranged. But Hanoi would probably conclude that the war in the South could be pressed with no greater risk to key areas of the DRV. Any DRV disposition to negotiate arising out of fears of attacks on the Hanoi-Haiphong area would be lessened.

- 5 -

T-O-P S-E-C-R-E-T

